

Reflections of Five Writers on Nigeria



Compiled By Whitney M. Young Jr. Information Resource Center

.....

Contents

<i>Writers on America ~ Writers on Nigeria</i> <i>Dr. Wendy Simmons</i>	3
<i>Being A Nigerian Writer</i> <i>Lola Shoneyin</i>	6
<i>“Telling My Story with a Pain in My Scrotum”: Reflections on a Writer’s Plight in a Season of Want.</i> <i>Hope Eghagha</i>	12
<i>Time, Tide and Style</i> <i>Sunny Ayewanu</i>	35
<i>Closed Doors, Open Spaces</i> <i>Toyin Adewale-Gabriel</i>	40
<i>A Journey Of Discoveries</i> <i>Emman Usman Shehu</i>	47

.....

Dr. Wendy Simmons

Writers on America ~ Writers on Nigeria

• *“Authors are, like*
• *everyone else, a*
• *product of their*
• *society so our*
• *authors rarely write*
• *about these topics,*
• *and do not*
• *necessarily feel the*
• *need to make strong*
• *political statements*
• *in their work,*
• *although they may.”*

Good evening and welcome. We’re very pleased that you joined us this evening to talk about the art of writing and the sense of place that informs the act of creating stories. My name is Wendy Simmons and I’m the Regional Information Resource Officer, or librarian if you prefer, for Public Affairs Sections of Anglophone West Africa. I’m based in Lagos.

The genesis of the program was a new publication called “*Writers on America*”, recently produced by our Office of International Information Programs in Washington. I’m not a writer, nor a literary critic, but it is my office that produced the booklet and that was enough of a reason for my colleagues to designate me to introduce our subject this evening.

For those of you who knew our cultural programs in the past, and die hard Cultural Affairs Officers around the world, we are keenly aware that in the past dozen years our focus on the arts and literature has diminished. We may still opt to develop local programs, but with fewer people, more demands pulling us to other priorities, and reduced budgets, these programs became implausible. The booklet you have is a small antidote to, conceived when one of our Cultural Affairs Officers, himself a published author, nearing his retirement, was given the time to produce it. Freedom of expression and freedom of assembly are part of the background which structures American society. Authors are, like everyone else, a product of their society so our authors rarely write about these topics, and do not necessarily feel the need to make strong political statements in their work, although they may. I read recently that Nadine Gordimer wanted to write science fiction, but living in South Africa during apartheid, she could not. American fiction has sometimes been criticized for its lack of dealing with serious topics, its characters’ self-absorption. Our relative long-term freedom and peace has allowed our authors to look at other issues.

.....

• *"The other related, frequent theme of American fiction is the issue of developing or coming into one's own identity. America is still a place where people can, with some very hard work and lots of luck, can begin with little and become a success."*

The other related, frequent theme of American fiction is the issue of developing or coming into one's own identity. America is still a place where people can, with some very hard work and lots of luck, can begin with little and become a success. The down side of this is that the US is often criticized as a place where individual achievement takes precedence over acting for the good of the community, or even family. So the issue of "finding oneself" or making a success of one's life, and the anguish this may cause, is part of our make up. The best heroes, so we believe, are those that make it not as a result of family wealth or connections, but on their own. The attempt to become a self-made man (usually it is men) without help, against all odds, are often reflected in American literature. Robert Olen Butler writes short stories based on his collection of postcard pictures from the early home cameras used in the early decades of the 20th century. For each he must dream of that optimistic era of our country when the individual achievements and potentials related to technology would have seemed almost endless.

Preparing to speak to you tonight has forced me to think about my own reading habits. I try to keep abreast of the best new American fiction by well-known and first time writers, but have just collected a number of new ones to read. I've also been living in or working related to Africa for most of the 30 years, so make some effort to read the writers of my adopted continent, although more of the southern part of the continent than the western side. And I must warn you that I just finished Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine*

Public Affairs Section
Embassy of the United States of
America
Plot 1075 Diplomatic Drive
Central District Area, Abuja,
Nigeria
Telephone: (234)-9-461-4000
Fax: (234)-9-523-0353
E-mail: usabuja@state.gov



Public Affairs Section
U. S. Consulate General
2, Broad Street,
Lagos, Nigeria.
Telephone: (234)-1-263-4865/
4868/3395/2504
Fax: (234)-1-263-5397
E-mail: uslagos@state.gov

<http://nigeria.usembassy.gov>